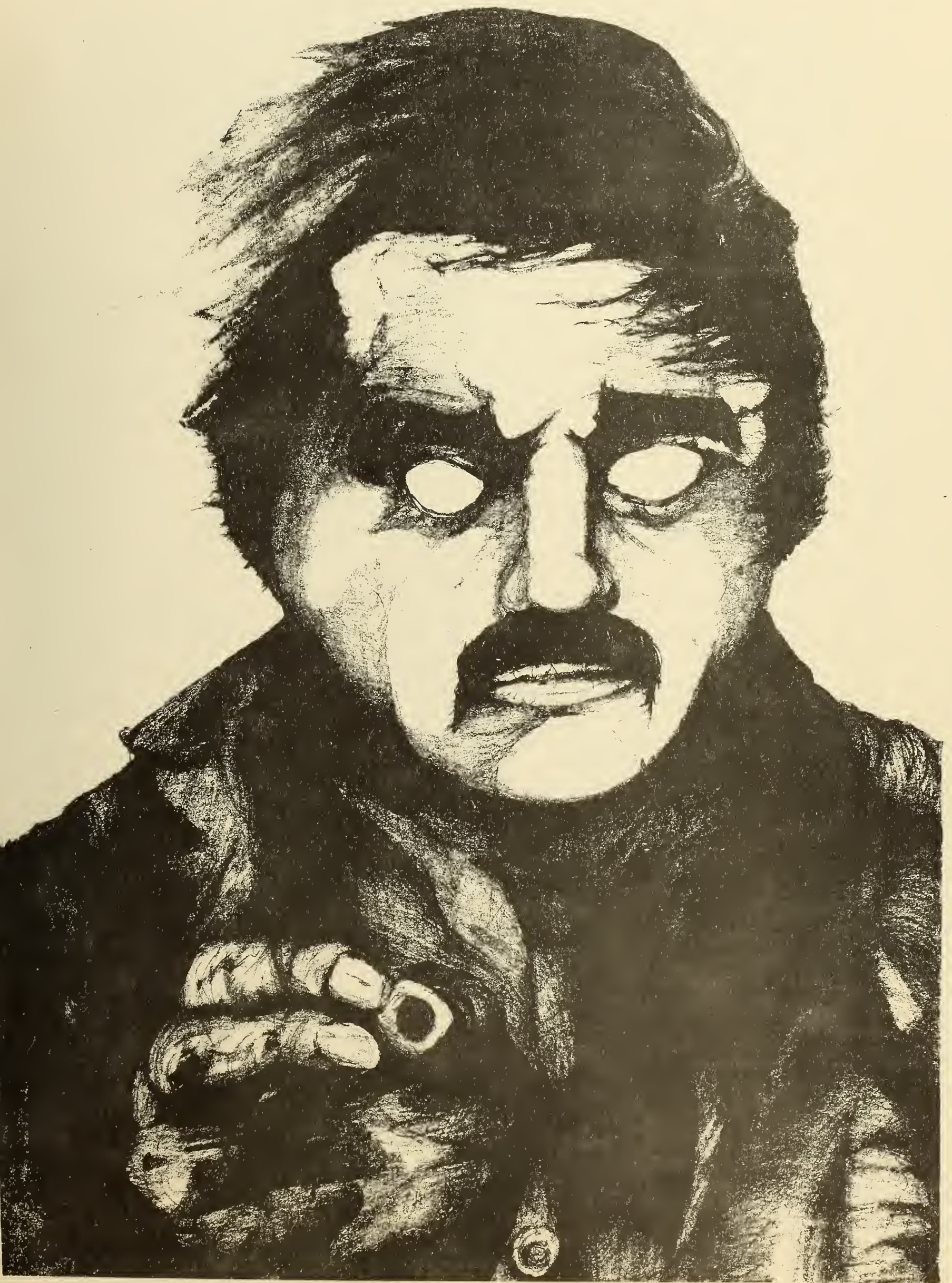



F. de: Pictures - 1981





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The editorial staff of the I is proud to present the annual literary magazine, an issue which contains selections of the best writing and art work of the year. We would like to thank all the students at Mount Wachusett who submitted work. Unfortunately, we could not print many outstanding pieces because of a lack of space. Many thanks again to all those who contributed.

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* * *

PRIZES:

First Prize
Second Prize

Poetry
Poetry

Judith Phelan
Kevin Labonville

First Prize
Second Prize

Short Story
Short Story

Andrea Peters
Barbara Oslund

Cover Design
Drawings

John Salovardos
Tas Shaughnessy

ON A RAINY NIGHT

by Judith A. Phelan

Loneliness is like
the air before the rain,
heavy and hollow.

You feel it
lingering over you
and you wait
for the sky to open
and drown you in
torrents of silvery tears.

Every sound seems
to echo and carry
through the nighttime
across little rivers
in the street
and off into nowhere
keeping in time
with the rhythmic beat
of my heart.

I rock in my chair
counting raindrops
and listening to the sound
of dripping on the roof.

There is no consolation
in keeping friends with the rain!
Its silent solitude
only reflects the loneliness
resting heavy on my heart.
If only there were a way
to catch the rain in my hands
and rinse my mind
of all recollections
of being loved before,
perhaps then
loneliness, like rain,
would be a gentle friend.

THE ALLIGATOR'S NEST

by Andrea Peters

The trees mewled against the rain's slash, groping in vain for some shelter. Their groaning creaks embodied the wood and their absence gave substance to the trail running through their midst. The protesting leaves collected the water, flipping it in heavy globs upon the rotting mat of the woodland floor.

The horse started as such a drop shattered upon his crest; she ignored it, driving him forward into the late winter day. They fell on her too, their weighty splash unnoticed against the outward pressures within her. But these pressures were on low flame now, unstoked, untended. These were eggs that could hatch out monstrous creatures. Yet, as of now, those creatures still swayed in their embryonic fluids. But even so, she knew a sudden jolt could set them stirring.

The horse, Rye, shied at some distant clatter disembodied by the fog.

She should have turned back. She had already worked him and he had gone well enough. And this little excursion was just to relax and cool him off; harmless enough, (but those eggshells had been softening of late). They had even stopped at the door for a moment, but she would not relent and she turned him towards the woods.

He had gone well enough but only well enough. And there was that bitter ghost within her, that ghost that had spawned those eggs. This male ghost that had inseminated her fertile mind with his poison, he did not even exist without her any more. He was gone from the world at large. But his insidious image had invaded her, engulfed her, metamorphosized within her. Yes, Thor was the father of all this alligator's nest, and she could not expel him.

(And Rye had only gone well enough)

Thor had been her instructor. She was a mere fifteen then, living in a world of idylls and dreams. To her, a handsome twenty-one year old gold medalist took on the aspect of a god. Such was Thor. His province was the American Dream. His authority was undeniable, though he was fatally flawed.

She was twenty now and had long since left him. But he had not left her. He inhabited her psyche still in images of sadistic domination. Barebacked astride his grey horse, his chest smeared with oil and gleaming in the sun, he pranced past her inner eye. It was a picture fit to be struck in gold, immortalized for its perfection. Yet there was some subtle stain that corrupted it. Perhaps it was the slightly malignant twist of the rider's lips. A disquieting expression lurked there, nearly unseen amid the structural beauty of those features. But it marred that quiet picture, and what's more it grew. The stain spread, washing out in waves of disharmony. Discord fell between horse and rider as that malignant seed matured. And inevitably the image dissolved in a struggle between dominator and dominated.

She would turn away then, knowing how the battle ended. The horse would return to the barn lathered, his mouth bleeding, his flank pitted and bloody where the spurs had raked across his ribs. Those wounds never healed; they stayed open all summer. For Thor was always the winner.

She, too, was the dominated and bore those suppurating wounds. They were open yet... They had gone down the back lawn to the edge of the woods. She steered Rye down the wrong path, then halted staring down the steep incline. She should have turned back right there. There was movement in the alligator's nest. A shudder ran through her as Thor's derisive laughter pricked in her mind. That familiar curse streamed through her consciousness accusing her of being chicken. She denied it, pressing Rye down the hill.

Rye slipped through the decay of the trail, moving on with reluctance. She paid no attention to the trail, being well-wrapped in a cocoon of her own making.

She did not feel the rain's spurs nor hear the trees' lamenting. Even her horse's nervousness did not concern her, not until he reared and turned to run back up the trail. She curbed him and sent him back down the hill.

Rye crab-walked, his eyes popping, fixed at the thunder of the stream. Newly-freed, the water tumbled headlong through the woodland's murk. Ice still grappled with the rocks in the streambed, slowly, gradually plundered into contortions of strangulated limbs, tortured fleshy ridges, lingering skeletons of frost. But the water, ice's offspring, had long won out and left the ice decaying. The stream wound sibilant and senuous as a sidewinder, coiling in upon itself, it lay waiting.

Rye goggled, twisted in a half-rear to flee, but she held him and brought him to a halt.

The stream slithered across the path. Mica eyes flickered from the midst of the water's body, issuing a reptilian challenge. A challenge that found some welcome among those nesting eggs within her. She clucked to Rye, compelling him forward. Rye pranced nervously toward the narrow ford, testing for a crack in his rider's control that he might escape through. She steadied him, feeling his straining will. She gave him a boot as he pulled left away from the path. He bolted forward, taking a mighty leap over the stream and landing so heavily he sent the girl crashing down into the saddle in a heap. She collected herself on the far side and pulled him up.

Turning back, she waited for some internal smile to form, some warmth to flicker up. Rye had done as she asked, she had ridden him long enough, he had trusted her and done as she asked, and it was the first stream of the year...She should go home.

But those mica eyes drew her, glaring as they did. Warily she peered back. That snake of a stream twisted before her, as much a boundary as it had been before, as much unconquered. She had defeated it once, yet it remained invincible. Thor, that god of her innards demanded victory, final and complete. But there was no victory here. Victory died in the moment of its fulfillment. It fell away like time, gone beyond recall, and left ever in its wake some new challenge to face. Oh, how strangely it resembled life, where one mountain conquered led only to the next. There was no state of equilibrium in life. Distance was covered, yes; but there was no cessation of the journey. One always landed at the base of the mountain. What a strange dream was this victory that Thor prodded her towards, as if at the moment of its achievement she could suspend time, at the pinnacle of one of life's hills she could fly out from the world, to return never more to life's valleys.

What a damning paradox this was. Victory was demanded, perfection her goal and neither could be finally attained. This strife was the breeding ground of that cold-blooded brood. Failure and despair, bitterness and self-hate; all these were the scaly offspring of Thor's decree. They were nurtured here among the convolutions of her mind.

There in the stream lay her boundary, and with an internal nudge from Thor she set off to meet it. They crossed the ford in a skirmish of flailing legs and mud. Enticed by the trail, Rye took flight in a homeward direction. She wrenched him around.

Where had her victory fled? Had it escaped up the trail with her horse's will? That snake of a stream lay gurgling with laughter, though she had conquered it. Had she not vanquished it? Yes...but there it remained, yet again a denial of her victory. Perfection, her god, Perfection, her tormentor would not release her.

They came down the trail once more. Rye flipped his head impatiently, straining to glance about, up the hill towards stall and his evening grain ration.

Her eye lit upon a spot where a slight slope fell away to the stream in a drop. She felt a compulsion to force her way across there, knowing it was the most

difficult spot to attempt a jump. She was well programmed. She knew it was the Thor within her that impelled her.

The drop was nested in decaying leaves and gnarly oak roots. It was slippery footing. It was too much to ask of Rye. She should turn back.

Then through the dismal grey she heard that ominous laugh.

'You are a chicken, my friend.'

Sarcasm dripped from the last two words.

'It is slippery. It is dangerous.'

'You, you are chicken.'

Her mind scurried from that thought, but it pursued her.

'It is time to turn back', she thought desperately.

'My friend...You are...'

They scuttled down the slope, Rye's forelegs extended stiffly in front of him, his weight shifting back as he negotiated the slight decline. He placed each foot tentatively, his nerves teetering precariously. As his forefeet plunged off the drop's lip, he reared back wildly flinging his head in her face with a resounding blow. She reeled back, the blood rising to her face, and felt the jarring loose of the alligator's eggs in her mind. Anger, bitterness, defeat: they stirred, their half-formed claws scratching sharply at their shells.

She rammed her legs into his flanks, heading him for the bank. Snorting, he resisted, side-stepping and rearing once more. She yanked on his bit, setting his teeth chattering and grinding in resentment. She jabbed him, but he refused to move forward, backing away from her legs instead. She yanked, she spurred, twisted flailing, smacked. The horse remained unmoved, nervously bearing this abuse.

Those eggs; they were hatching. Bitterness burst free, scaly and green, feeding on the disobedience of her horse. She lashed out wildly, striking the horse across the withers. Rye flinched, but held fast.

Self-hate clambered forth, barraging her with cold contempt. Throwing the reins down she clenched her fists, driving her nails into the flesh of her palms. She grit her teeth, seething in self-revulsion.

She was a prisoner, long since brainwashed, her mind overrun with some alien desire. She was an actress stuck repeating the same scene over and over. Why must she play at being Thor? She rejected him utterly and yet retained his teachings. Thor was a good teacher. He taught her self-defeat. She was tortured by those impossible demands and their bitter results.

She curled in upon herself, searching out some tiny bud of calmness, as yet uneaten by the mutiny within her. Remorse followed, sadly speaking of Rye; Rye, her beloved, Rye her abuser. Rye, his eyes widening, his ears pricked forward, giving her that curious look of a baby. That gaze followed her, gently, lovingly through the barn. It rested on her as she cleaned the other horses' stalls. Patiently, Rye waited and watched. And when she finally came to him he nuzzled her cheek with his supple velvet-covered nose. He placed his nose in her gloved hand as she stroked his chestnut neck. He blew warm air into her face and she breathed back in his nose, greeting him horse fashion. He pulled off her hat, flipping it about the stall playfully. He poked about her pockets, his nose wiggling curiously, searching for the apple she always brings him. They flowed together, the girl and the horse, like jigsaw puzzle pieces, forming one creature, one being.

She watched him in the pasture, daily, weekly, as his insatiable curiosity sent him chasing and playing with the other horses. She watched his glee, as he bucked each stride as he ran across the pasture, as he grasped his companion by the halter dragging the other horse in a half-circle. She watched him as gently and intently as any lover or any mother.

And here she was beating her beloved Rye. She sat upright suddenly, startling Rye after her long stillness.

The horse started forward and she, desiring to escape those barbed dragons within, urged him forward faster. They galloped through the woodland, running from that brood of dragons, galloping from the furious hold of Thor.

They careened around a rocky corner, scrambling for a foothold. A water-logged branch slapped the girl in the face as they shot through the woods. Hooves fell clattering on the gravelly trail as they flashed round the upper fork. Their bodies slanted wildly, held up by momentum alone.

Then down a long sloping hill appeared the ravine. Someone had blocked the edge with brush and logs so that the bottom could not be seen. But it could be heard. The ravine crooned like some primeval dinosaur. A voice of extinction rose up its craggy gullet, rumbling over its burly edge and on, hitting the girl and the horse like a shock wave as they plummeted down the trail. The voice spoke of darkness and timelessness. It hypnotized with its wordless benedictions. It called up those dragons the girl ran from. Those dragons landed in force. Self-hate prodded by defeat spurred on by ambition, each arrived to fight within her mind.

Quietly Thor let fall a thought that rippled out across her mind.

'That would be the ultimate victory.'

She could conquer that brood once and for all.

She crouched low over the pommel, her eyes intent, her expression determined. They sped down the slope.

'We are bullets.'

'We are waterfalls.'

They pounded down stride by stride, unchecked, unappeased. Her eyes focused hard on the brush-laden ledge. Her mind closed in upon the thought of victory and the brooding call of the chasm. She clenched down onto her horse's neck murmuring fiercely.

'Come on, come on.'

The horse lengthened his frame, increasing his pace with each stride. That space, that air above the chasm yawned before them. Ten strides, -wo strides. She sank in the saddle gripping hard, eyes possessed. Right hind fell, left hind fell. Air shot searing through the horse's lungs. Right fore, left fore. Hind legs together. They catapulted up, free of the earth and floated out above the voice of timelessness.

THE RIVER

by Kevin Labonville

By force of nature this body created
Like a vein on my arm, pulsing with life.

The river pulses, but in slowed motion
Its beating heart, the clouds in the sky.

It seeks its own level, searching endlessly.
Its body supports lives
and fisherman's whims.

My river
The Squanicook I have grown with it
And in it.

It supports my body with loving fingers

I drift beneath the surface and I am the river.
I know my past and suspect my future.

I shy from August heat,
And swell at April rains.
I caress the land, envelope it
And leave no evidence of my passing.

None but the memory of a summer swim
or a cool drink.

by Barbara Oslund

The heat was so intense that it was almost tangible; the air felt like it could be sliced with a razor. Brett stood looking at the gas tank of another car, grasping the nozzle of the gas pump like a gun. He mentally spat on his job, and everything else that was miserable. Long, wavy blond hair flowed on his shoulders and annoyingly stuck to his forehead, but he refused to cut his hair for anyone.

Cars kept rolling in, purring, chugging like barely restrained wild animals, wanting their nourishment. Tanned beach boys drove their animals, and seemed to be smug, secretly laughing at Brett in his situation. The girlfriends in the cars, luscious in their summer clothes, seemed to challenge Brett with their coy eyes. Oh, but Brett knew so well about these women. Their brains were between their legs; the girls were as stupid as they were beautiful. He remembered past relationships, how girls couldn't or didn't try to understand him. Brett had but one love, and that love came before all others, including women.

The sultry afternoon wore on, slow like a tear rolling down someone's face. The heat throbbed, and Brett's head throbbed. When quitting time came, he set out on the familiar route, finally thumbing a car to a stop. The driver was a black man, who asked Brett if he was interested in buying a quantity of Valiums. Brett replied no, his head was scrambled enough without drugs. The man was kind enough to drive Brett directly to his house.

Brett wished that he could get paid for staying home, for his main love was there, especially when his mother wasn't present. He walked into the garage and there his life truly took on its meaning. The building held no cars. Instead, there were stacks of amplifiers, reel-to-reel tape recorders, albums, a turntable, and in a corner in a brown leather case rested the most important object: Brett's guitar. It was black as onyx, polished so that when light hit it the shine was blinding. Brett gently picked it up, and sat down on the only chair, cradling the guitar as if it were his own flesh and blood. He gazed at a poster on the wall, picturing the late, great James Marshall Hendrix at the Monterey Pop Festival, California, 1967. Brett sat and thought, and relaxed, letting his first smile of the day play upon his lips.

The moment was broken with the crash of a door. It was Brett's mother, a short round woman, with curlers in her bleached hair and too much makeup on her aging face.

"So you're home! It's about time. I want you to mow the lawn, it has almost grown to the windows. When are you going to mow that mop on your head? And I want you to wash the dishes, I have a date tonight. Will you stop mooning around this garage and making hideous noises with that guitar! What is your problem, what's the matter with your head?"

Brett looked at her with vacant eyes, saying nothing. She was nothing but a stinging gnat in his life. He paid her plenty of board money, and as long as he did he wouldn't get kicked out, because his mother loved that money too much.

"Can't you even answer me? It's a good thing your father (may he rest in peace) isn't alive to see what a nothing you are. He would have knocked you into shape but good, and torn that damned hair out by the roots."

With that Brett's mother stomped out, and he watched her wide bottom waddle away. He idly wondered about what kind of sleazy old man she would be going out with this night.

After a few minutes, Brett got into his former mood, thinking about the magic world his guitar provided. Music was his drug; he couldn't live without playing, releasing his feelings through his guitar. Brett stood up, and plugged the guitar into an amplifier. After a few warm-up chords, he began working on a song called "Message of Love," by Jimi Hendrix. The chords and riffs were difficult and intricate. Brett then played a song by Robin Trower, called "Bridge of Sighs." The guitar cried, sang, and wailed, giving a prayer to some wild electronic God. The transformation of the face of the musician was powerful. Love for the instrument was evident, as were expressions of intense concentration, anger and pain.

Next, Brett played an original composition of his, called "Winter's Day." He played with an innovative and unique style. "Winter's Day" was one of the songs Brett had played at the audition for the band that needed a new lead guitarist. "Machine Head" was the name of the band, and they were getting extremely popular in the area. The band played at bars and concert halls, and seemed to be heading for good times. However, Brett had always thought their lead guitarist was second-rate. Brett believed he could really help the band by giving it a strong lead guitar sound. He felt he could relate to the band members and the direction their music was going. Yet, the members showed no positive or negative reactions when Brett had played music with them. He had felt as if he were on trial, for the band members held dead-pan faces, like a jury Brett once faced.

Brett played two or three more songs, and then decided to eat and shower, for the heat was bad even in the garage.

After his shower, Brett took a walk and met a boy he had known before he dropped out of school. They drank a couple of beers and made meaningless conversation. Brett decided to go home because there wasn't much else to do. As he walked through the doorway to his house, he heard his mother in the living room with her date, making frenzied sounds. In his mind Brett pictured two sweaty elephants making love.

The phone rang in the kitchen, and Brett strolled over to answer it.

"Hello, is this Brett? This is Jeff, from "Machine Head." I and the other guys in the band really don't think you can dig what kind of music trip we're into. Your playing was decent the other day, but your sound doesn't have much public appeal. Look man, it's too bad, but those are the breaks. I just thought I'd call and let you know."

Brett said, in a low voice, that he understood, and quickly hung up.

The remainder of the night passed quickly, for Brett went to bed soon after his phone call. In the heat he lay stripped on his bed, surprisingly falling asleep in a short time. However, he was disturbed in his sleep with grotesque dreams of green and red pulsing lights, a haunting space holding nothing but those colors.

The next morning dawned fiery red and hot, like the day before. Brett dragged himself through the thick air to go to work at the gas station. At the hottest part of the day, an old lady wanted him to put transmission fluid in her car. The sweat was rolling off Brett's forehead and getting in his eyes, making things blurry. The job was messy, and when he was finished, he disgustedly slammed the hood down--on his right hand. The pain and shock were incredible, and Brett bit his lip to smother his scream. He couldn't believe the stupidity of his accident. He looked at his bloody hand and knew some of the fingers were probably broken. His next thought was about his guitar and how long it would be before he could play, and regain skill in the damaged fingers--it could be months.

Brett wrapped his hand in Kleenex and clean rags, the only makeshift bandage he could find. He told the other gas attendant he was going to the hospital. Lacking transportation, Brett thumbed the road to the hospital, just bearing the pain from his throbbing hand. Finally a car stopped, and the driver was the black man who had

picked Brett up the day before. He got in the car, and answered the man's obvious questions about his hand. Brett's eyes grew vacant, like when he looked at his mother. He spoke to the driver.

"Listen, do you still have the Valiums you told me about yesterday? I was thinking I should start dealing myself, because I really need the money. Could you sell me about 50 hits?"

The deal was arranged for Brett and despite the man's concern about Brett's hand, Brett asked to be dropped off at the lake on the outskirts of town.

The beach on the lake was crowded with swimmers, but Brett avoided the area. He started picking his way along a fisherman's trail around the lake. The rags and Kleenex were blood-soaked, and his long blond hair stuck to his head with sweat. The woods grew thicker, for there were few houses on the lake. Finally, he reached the point exactly opposite to the beach across the lake. There Brett sat on the edge of the water. He thought of Jimi Hendrix, and the guitars began to play in his head. Brett performed a small ritual there on the edge, cool waters giggling at him. Guitars screamed louder, and slowly, methodically, he counted from 1 to 50. Green and red lights closed in, pulsing over the water.

That night, Brett's mother wondered, but only briefly, about why her son didn't come home. In the garage, the guitar lay silent in its leather case. The silence was an eerie echo of the music once created, and of the love once transmitted across its strings.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PGIMY

By Tony Devlin

Caught in a life and death situation
In a place where you fend for yourself
Worried about a bone separation
By a lion or anything else
Walking the paths of the jungle
Searching for food in the trees
Try to make friends with the animals
Alike an aardvark or a chimpanzee

Well it's all in a day in the life of a pigmy
A day in the toil and strife of a pigmy
Where you could end up a tribal chieftain
Or maybe end up just like a side of beef and die
It's a typical day in the life of a pigmy
Consisting of toil and strife of a pigmy
Where eating your friends is a daily occurrence
They could eat you if you don't have insurance, you die

Living is just for the dominant
Dying is just for the weak
Ride on the back of an elephant
You can find all the girls that you seek
But there's a fight ev'ry Thursday with Zulus
Two ev'ry day with a snake
Get ready to roast if you do lose
Oh, how much of this can you take?

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They could eat you if you don't have insurance, you die

Sunday you pick up your ju-ju beads
Do what the witch doctor says
You cut off a finger to see if it bleeds
Well I think you'd be better off dead
The boys all go off to the next village
They each have their own special spear
Occasionally raping you pillage
Is more fun than hunting for deer

Well it's all in a day in the life of a pigmy
A day in the toil and strife of a pigmy
Where you could end up a tribal chieftain
Or maybe end up just like a side of beef and die
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CINDY PAINTS

by P.M. Monahan

Captured and caged within her
Every color waits to dance
Upon a canvas floor
A ballet of lines within her swells
Shaping polkas in her mind
From hand to brush the waltz begins
From Vienna to Versailles
Toe to toe in tempo with her heart
Feeling becomes reality
An image taking form
And the canvas is transversed
With the memory of the dance
And the melody of her gift.

THE FALLEN ATHLETE

by Marilyn Davidson

Three miles passed and three to go
his pace; steady, smooth, slow.
He once ran with grace and style
and finished with ease a four minute mile.
From off in the distance a runner closed in.
The pangs of competition echoed within
his once strong body which tried to achieve.
With every stride he did cleave
to the thoughts of rising above the rest;
pushing on, enduring, striving for the best.
Though his body had weakened, his mind would not;
his heart trembled for the winner's spot.
Another competitor passed him by,
his weary soul could only try.
He arrived at the end of his journey with grief,
collapsed on the curb, and cried out in relief.
His empty eyes glanced away from the rest
and focused on who was now the best.
He longed for the taste of glory and pride.
Inside he wept, for the hope had died.

Bottled Games

by Ronda L. Girard

the ozzing,
squeezing feeling
increases inside
as the dark hidden
waste cans of my mind empty
on this page, recreating the moments
I've hidden
so long, so well.
bits and fragments
slowly
reorganizing
my pain.
music,
the deafening music in the room
whirling,
spinning cobwebs in the air around
me.

a gloomy,
dark,
damp overcast
enchanted
the once joyous room
of a ten year old.
light beams misted through
a small window, silhouetting
figures in the corner.
I stood with a weak tingling
in my knees.

red,
pulsating lights, overcoming
the constant, dim stream
from the window.
waves of terror, racing
through my spine.
the larger figure dashed
to the door of the room.
"Timmy", I stuttered,
I pleaded.
the tiny figure
would not
move,
would not
speak.

light:
white, blinding, piercing
light,
figures,
darting around me.
a mattress on wheels
whizzed past me.
the rag doll child, staring,
with cold,
uncaring eyes
was laid on the metal cart
which quickly raced
out the door.

alone,
as if I were
never there, a mere vision
in a dream.
standing,
amidst the music,
electric trains,
toy soldiers,
and one
small
empty
brown bottle.

POEM

by Michael Thomson

I fell in love today
But I knew not what to do.
So I asked the lion
To help me with a clue.

The lion roared
"Move on" and then,
"Don't go on
To where you've been."

I asked the tiger
He growled and again,
"Don't go on
To where you've been."

I asked the fox
Lying in his pen,
"Don't go on
To where you've been."

I ignored them all,
Although I knew
It was the lamb
I listened to.

"Live and love
Your heart will mend.
Going on
Is not where you've been."

The painful memories
Thoughts of my past
I go on,
But they forever last.

TUBBY

by Steve Lemieux

A beautiful, scantily clad young girl ran gracefully through a rich green field. Her silky dark hair glistened in the sparkling sunshine. She was smiling and looked very happy. A tall dark evergreen forest stood at the edge of the field, but the girl appeared to become increasingly frustrated because she could come no closer to the forest no matter how fast she ran.

This beautiful scene was interrupted abruptly by the buzzing of an alarm clock which jarred Lucille Marie "Tubby" Windermayer back into reality. The clock read 7:00 as Tubby slowly moved her massive arm to shut it off. Tubby never knew why she got up at 7:00 every morning. She just did.

It took Tubby several minutes to muster the strength to lift her huge legs up from the bed and onto the floor, probably because she weighed 450 pounds. As a matter of fact, probably the most noticeable feature of her grotesque form was her legs. Like enormous tree trunks they rubbed together violently when she tried to walk. This created a terrible chafing, almost as if the bark were missing on the inside of each tree. The fat in her legs formed rings as if she had stuck a bunch of tires underneath her skin.

As she lifted her legs out of bed, old dark blue sneakers were the first things to touch the floor. She had to go to bed fully clothed, including sneakers because she was incapable of dressing herself without nearly collapsing from exhaustion. As she grabbed her rickety old bedpost to pull her full weight out of the bed, her sneakers showed quite clearly her horribly flattened feet. This severe disfigurement was obviously caused by the enormous weight that was constantly put on them.

As she slowly scuffed across her cold, dusty gray floor toward her dresser, she plucked the crust out of the thin cracks in her eyes and ate it. Her eyes were always nearly shut due to the masses of flab surrounding them. Her face was nearly formless but an expression that was both mean and lonely was still discernable. Big jowls that looked like bags of grain hung from her cheeks.

Tubby looked into her dirty cracked mirror. She fumbled with an elastic band to pull her raunchy hair off her face. Her hair was greasy and black with large chunks of dandruff throughout. Her fingers were so enormous there was practically no space between them, so she always had quite a hard time getting all her hair under the control of the elastic. Tubby did not especially like being dirty, but she had gotten accustomed to the idea because she could not maneuver in a shower or fit into a bathtub, and also because of her difficulty in getting dressed. She had tried different techniques of sponge bathing and washing her hair in the sink but had little success in anything except making a mess. Besides, a forty-two year old woman living in a dingy apartment in Chicago can just barely survive on her welfare check. Buying luxuries like soap or shampoo was out of the question. Much of her check went to pay for rent, which was much too high for the poverty level three-room apartment she inhabited. Any money left over went for food. Obviously, she could eat as much as she bought or stole and still never felt quite full.

After Tubby had straightened her hair in the elastic, she tried to smooth out her filthy green dress with her hands, but it was permanently wrinkled and soiled. Indeed, she only had two dresses which were identical right down to the tattered sleeves. She went to the laundry once a month, washing an alternate dress and her bedsheets every trip. The washing was of limited usefulness, though, because she never bought any detergent to use.

Tubby slowly moved towards the kitchen, squeezing sideways to fit through the

door between the bedroom and kitchen. She spent most of her day here, preparing and devouring one meal after another. Her only enjoyments from life were a decrepit old white cat named Max and an old black and white television set. These were the two things her father left to her when he died. Max was quite often restricted to one bowl of milk every two days, but he stayed with Tubby anyway. The television only got two channels, but it kept Tubby and Max amused.

Tubby walked by the kitchen table, stopped to scratch Max's ears, then headed straight for her ancient refrigerator. It was nearing the end of the month and supplies were running low. The welfare check would be welcomed in another week. Tubby reached her gas stove and picked up the cast iron frying pan which was on the front burner. She banged it on the counter to knock off any dried food residue, then threw in a slab of margarine and slowly turned the gas knob. Fortunately the bright blue flame ignited. She had not paid her bill in two months and expected the gas would be shut off soon. It would not be the first time. She methodically broke one dozen eggs into the pan and stirred them quickly so they would scramble evenly. Tubby had decided long ago to cook everything the easiest, most economical way possible. She kept no spices or flavorings on hand because they were far too expensive. The money would be far better invested on something that was filling.

As she scrambled the eggs, she browned eight pieces of toast and spread a generous glob of margarine on each. She also poured herself milk into a glass that easily emptied a quart bottle. The glass showed the remnants of many other usings without being washed. In fact the brown scum on the rim of the glass almost added an extra thickness to the glass itself.

When this first breakfast was complete, she sat down next to Max and switched on the old T.V.

"Let's see what's on the tube, Max ol' boy," she blurted as a good-sized chunk of egg popped out of her mouth. Max's eyes bugged out as he quickly pounced on it. Tubby pulled him away, however, and stuffed the piece of egg back in her mouth. She threw the cat across the floor where he angrily stared back at her. "Stupid cat, stealin' my egg," she yelled in a masculine voice.

The television had warmed up to channel 6, but "The Price is Right" was not on as it usually was at this time. Instead, a parade with all kinds of fancy marching bands and streaming floats was passing by the screen. "What the hell is this?" shouted Tubby as her fat fingers momentarily put down the fork and switched to channel 8. Expecting to see "The \$10,000 Pyramid" she was dumbfounded to see a football game on this channel. Furiously, she turned back to channel 6 and saw a float go by with the words she recognized to be "Merry Christmas." "Is today Christmas? Of course today is Christmas," she mumbled to herself. Max hearing her voice had forgiven her for his unscheduled flight across the room. He came back over and jumped on her massive lap.

As Tubby finished her eggs, she dumped a few drops of milk into the bottom of the plate for Max and said, "Merry Christmas, Max. You're the only friend I've got." Max paid no attention as he absolutely devoured the milk off the plate. Towards the end of the month, Max's milk rations tended to get very scarce. He was a little too old to have much luck catching mice so his survival depended entirely on Tubby's generosity, which usually was anything but generous. It was obvious that old age and malnutrition were taking their toll on Max. Much of his fur had fallen out,

leaving sore pink blotches of skin showing. Tubby had stepped on his tail, hopelessly crushing the back half of it. His teeth were almost as rotten as Tubby's and several of his claws had fallen out. Nevertheless, he was still lovable and faithful to Tubby and was indeed the only friend she had.

When Max finished his milk, Tubby slid the plate out of the way for use with her next breakfast. The chafing on her legs was extremely leaky this morning, so she decided to put on some lotion she had stolen from the drugstore. At first, stealing bothered her a lot but as her need for food became more desperate, she found shoplifting as the only possible solution. She had two huge pockets in her dresses and was so fat nobody noticed the extra bulge of the stolen goods in them. Besides, she put up such an obnoxious odor that most managers would be glad to let her have anything she wanted as long as she left quickly. Tubby was not proud of stealing. Just as some of the girls in her apartment building were prostitutes, stealing was Tubby's way of making ends meet. This justification seemed reasonable and she had never been caught, so she did not worry about it.

She could just barely bend down enough to rub the lotion on the sores on her legs. Although she was practically illiterate and could not read the words on the bottle, the lotion felt cool and soothing and smelled good. Whatever it actually was for was of little consequence to Tubby.

Carrying around 450 pounds for even a short time can be extremely tiring so Tubby decided to take a little nap before she got hungry again. As she ambled into her living room which actually was no bigger than a walk-in closet, she once again had to inhale and turn sideways to fit through the tiny door. She collapsed with a thud that almost splintered the big old fluffy chair in which she sat. Feathers flew out of the back of the chair and scattered about the room. She called out, "Max, come see Tubby." As her cat nestled between her huge drooping breasts, she shook her head as she realized even she called herself "Tubby." It was such a derogatory name. She had a sharp memory and still remembered the fifth grade when a boy named Jackie Goozie had called her "Tubby." Soon all her classmates and friends, even her teachers called her Tubby. She had always hated the name and often cried herself to sleep when she was a youngster hearing "Tubby, Tubby, Tubby, Tubby,....." over and over in her head. Today was the first time she had ever called herself Tubby. She sighed as she wiped the frost from the window and saw the people walking towards the church across the street. She had never been to a Christmas service. For the past ten years she could not have fit in the pews anyway. Besides, if there was a God he surely would not make her live like this.....

Once again the beautiful young girl ran through the bright green field. This time the girl was no longer smiling. She seemed much more concerned with reaching the evergreen forest than she had been before. Below the towering evergreen trees there was a much smaller beautifully shaped pine tree which was meticulously decorated with Christmas ornaments. On the top of it was a stunning gold star which twinkled in the bright sunshine. It was so beautiful she longed to reach it but once again she could get no closer to the forest no matter how fast she ran. Even though the sun sparkled in the sky it began to snow. The perfectly symmetrical flakes glistened as they softly covered the girl and the field. She kept on running. Suddenly church bells started tolling.

Tubby awakened with a start. The bells chimed beautifully as the smiling parents and playful children paraded by her window, certainly on their way to warm clean houses to open Christmas presents, eat a delicious Christmas dinner and feel full when they were done, and feel a kind of loving warmth and belonging that Tubby had never in her life felt. She fumed at the unfairness of it all.

As a sudden rush of sadness and fury engulfed Tubby, she grabbed Max who was comfortably asleep and hurled him across the room and out into the kitchen. The cat got up, momentarily dazed, then angrily stomped into the bedroom till Tubby got over her anger.

Tubby squeezed into the kitchen and put some water on the stove to boil for spaghetti. This was the last item she had left in her cupboards. She would never make it till tomorrow so she planned to take the last bit of money she had and go to the store as soon as she finished this meal. As the spaghetti danced merrily in the boiling water, she once again clicked on the television set. On channel 6, a choir of very neat looking little boys with girls' voices sang out Christmas carols. Disgusted that "Match Game-80" had been pre-empted she switched over to channel 8 only to be greeted by another football game. In a rage, she looked around for Max to release her anger on. He had curled up at her sneakers, but had sensed her fury building and was about to make his escape. Her foot just caught his rear end, hurtling him against the wall. Poor Max got up and limped into the bedroom. Her anger still not dissipated, Tubby lifted her gargantuan arm and let a mighty blow onto the top of the T.V. The back of the set popped out, spreading a jumbled network of wires, tubes, transistors and dreams across the dusty floor. Tubby, realizing what she had done muttered "that Goddamn T.V. was no good anyway."

She strained her spaghetti, scooped out half a tub of margarine on it and quickly began to devour the starchy strands. As she finished she noticed her apartment had gotten even colder than usual. She felt her ice cold radiator and recalled skipping her heating bill this month in order to stock up on hamburg.

She picked up her tattered coat off the back of her chair and started wrestling to get it around her mountainous shoulders. This coat had been out of style for so long that it was once again in style. However, it was not stylish for coats to have holes in the sleeves that revealed calloused elbows or to be tied around the waist with a piece of clothesline rope. It was also not stylish for a coat to be the size of a pup tent, but even at this size it was tight on Tubby.

As she carefully took the money out of her small cardboard box in her dresser drawer, she clenched it firmly in one of her large fists. It would not leave her hand until she reached the store, since all of her coat pockets had holes in them. She left her apartment and locked the door, checking it twice the same way she always did. She waddled down the dimly lit hall toward the exit onto the street. Two small boys coming towards her in the hall laughed because they had to go back onto the street and wait for her to come out. Obviously they could not, nor had they any desire to pass her in the hall.

Tubby started down the street with much difficulty on the snow and ice. She realized that if she should slip and fall down, she could not get back up and she was certain nobody would help her to get up. She always went to the same little grocery store, called Maury's. Maury was a kind old Jewish man who never said a word to Tubby, but surely saw her shoplifting more than once, yet never confronted her. Tubby especially like the nice wide aisles. Often other customers had a little difficulty steering around her, but at least most of them could fit by without ramming her in the rear end. Tubby also could not fit between the registers, so Maury always emptied out her cart for her, then piled the bundles in her fat arms outside the store. Maury, a short balding man of about 55, was the only person who ever

showed Tubby any kindness since her father died. She always told herself that she would not shoplift from Maury again, but never could keep the promise.

A big sign gripped Tubby's attention like an electric shock as she reached Maury's entrance. It read: Closed all day Christmas--Happy Holidays. "Goddammit, where will I get food?" Tubby yelled louder than she thought. A group of young boys walking by laughed, shouting "you don't need any food, fatso!" Tubby spit at them and took a step forward, nearly losing her balance.

The walk home seemed endlessly tiring. It began to snow. Darkness was starting to set in as the street lights clicked on. Tears dripped down the creases in Tubby's fat face as she waddled past Christmas carolers and children out playing with their new sleds in the snow. Her chafed legs had split open in the cold and blood ran over and around the tires in her legs.

After what seemed like an eternity, she reached her apartment. As she walked down the darkened hallway, she wondered how she could survive the night without any food. She wondered why people were so mean to her. She wondered why it was cold and dark and snowing. She wondered why her father left her.

Tubby unlocked the door to her gray apartment and snapped on the tiny light that dimly illuminated her grubby kitchen. Max was stretched out on the floor. She called to him but he did not get up. Walking over to him, she saw his eyes wide open. She gently nudged him with her foot but his stiff, cold body did not react.

For the first time since her father died, Tubby smiled. It hurt her face a bit at first, but then it gave her a warm feeling. She gently picked up Max and cradled his lifeless body in her arms. Walking to her stove, she snuffed out the tiny blue pilot lights, then opened up the gas valves all the way.

She fell into her big fluffy chair with Max in her arms. Another tuft of feathers scattered about the floor. Tubby wiped the frost off the window and watched the children happily play as she dozed off to sleep.

The pretty young dark-haired girl once again ran through the field. She seemed hysterically desperate to reach the Christmas tree in the forest now. She was crying and her shapely body seemed to shiver as the steady snow fell upon it. Suddenly, she seemed to make progress towards the forest. As she got closer, she seemed to be attracted almost like a magnet by the beautiful gold star on the Christmas tree. She wanted it more than anything. She fell. The sun blinded her. She ran. The snow eased up, then stopped. She stopped running but continued walking steadily as she neared the forest. A smile slowly encompassed her face. As she reached the Christmas tree, she extended her arms to the golden star. She had reached the forest.

MY LONELY D.J.

by Jeanne Doss

PEOPLE WAITING IN LONG LINES IN ANTICIPATION, TO SEE THE
AMAZEMENT OF LIGHTS AND SOUND.

ONCE THEY PASS THE IDENTIFICATION AND PROPER DRESS, THEY
REALIZE THAT THE D.J. IS THE BEST AROUND.

THE NIGHT GOES ON AND THE PEOPLE GET DOWN AND THE CROWD
IS GROWING MASSIVE.

PEOPLE ARE DRINKING AND SMOKING AND DANCING, AND OTHERS
ARE JUST A BIT PASSIVE.

THE LIGHTS ARE BRIGHTLY SYNCHRONIZED AND THE MIXES ARE
MATCHED IN PERFECT BEAT.

THE D.J. IS GETTING INTO ALL HE DOES, AS HE PLAYS
"DANCING IN MY FEET".

"DANCER", "I WILL SURVIVE", AND DONNA SUMMER'S GREATEST
HITS,

THE WOOFERS AND TWEETERS BRING THE SOUND ALIVE, AS HE
PERFORMS HIS GREATEST MIX.

THE D.J. BOOTH IS CROWDED, GIRLS FLOCK AROUND HIM WITH
REQUESTS AND CHEER,

AS HE SNAPS HIS FINGER AT ANOTHER GIRL, AND SHOUTS LOUDLY,
"GET ME A BEER"!

THE NIGHT IS ALMOST OVER NOW, AND THE CROWDS ARE DYING DOWN,
AND GETTING THIN.

THE D.J.'S EYES LOOK TIRED AND GLASSY AS THE FINAL RECORD
SPINS.

THE MUSIC STOPS, THE DANCING IS DONE, AND THE SMOKE IS
HANGING IN THE AIR ABOVE,

AND BEYOND THE BLOWN WOOFERS AND FRIED TWEETERS, LIES MY
LONELY D.J. LOOKING FOR LOVE.

WHAT HAST THOU SLAIN IMMORTAL ONE?

by Mark Rudziak

What hast thou slain Immortal One?
What swine or saint or seraphim
Tastes a copper on its tongue
And, wheezing out a clotted breath,
Wonders what will be for Death.

What frail eidolon is torn,
By thy steely sagittal sword,
And of the day that thou were born,
Doth speak a winter blizzard gust,
Then falls to earth vindictive dust.

Hast thou crammed the mouth of Hell
With aromatic amaranth,
To smother demons with the smell
That darkness lie beneath the bloom,
That Hell itself become a tomb.

Or do the walls of Heaven lie,
Like crumbled crackers careless cast,
Strewn about as angels cry
For God to come and ease their pain,
Yet who in Heaven now doth reign?

POEM

by David C. Wyman, Jr.

Sometimes I wish I lived my life
On a carrousel going round and round
And round and round and round and
Going know-where. On painted ponies
Prancing and a unicorn adorned
In gold--a little up and a
Little down, I'd ride and ride
And ride just going know-where.

A mechanical princess pirouettes
Around and back again and around
So gracefully until the music stops.
The music is played like a sympathy
For dancers and prancers and Merry-
Go-Rounders while I'm charging fast on
My unicorn still going around and around
And around a little up and a little down.

For I'm drunken with dementia
 Sloshing along on a shadowed lane
In spite of kindled spirits
 Whose flame enlightens me.
This tavern keeps them bottled in
 Spite of their condition
Come morning I'll be bottled in
 Spite of my condition.
 (And I hear
 a voice
 Inside my ear)

Now I'm looking longly
Into a shattered glass
That's looking back
At me in fragments
Reading into a story book
With indented tears upon
The page describing me,
And I'm looking longly
Through the window's pane
Aching for the pleasure
Of some company in here.

The voice I hear inside my ear
Is nothing but a newsense,
And this is what it whispers:
 "Sometimes I wish I lived my life
 On a carrousel going round and round
 And round and round and round
 and going know-where."

POEM

by Anne Blanchette

This morning I woke
to rain on my windows
and rain in my head
which even Chopin
circling my room
couldn't absorb.

This morning I escaped
to honey-thick air
and rain-webs on pines
which even my soul
couldn't feel.

Instead,
I only saw.

And as to the puddle-moat
imprisoning me on the porch,
The rain;
falling needles
bloated my heart.

And then my ride came.
Wheels spurting mud;
angry.
Gas in my lungs
instead of the wet air.
But it did not matter;
They both stung

Like fire,
raging
that even the rain
hot with anger
could not soothe.

Then I paused.
Searching:
the clouds,
my soul,
my world,
my God.
But there were no answers.
Not today.

I MADE IT THROUGH THE RAIN

by Theresa M. Roy

A strange buzzing sound suddenly filled the air, breaking the peaceful silence that had once enveloped the darkened room. Terry slowly turned over in her bed, barely aware of the sound. But as its insistent buzzing continued, her dark eyes opened just enough to allow her to see the dreaded alarm clock. Throwing the pink flowered sheets aside, she raised her hand and reached over to shut the alarm off. A quick glance at the illuminated dial showed that it was two minutes after six in the morning. Groaning, she lifted herself out of bed, still half asleep, and trudged lazily into the kitchen.

The room was gray, and Terry could tell it was going to be a dreary day. Raindrops softly splashed on the window where the sun usually shone, and the wispy gray-black clouds seemed to cover the early morning sky for endless miles. Sighing to herself, she turned away from the bleary window and switched on the nearby radio.

"Good morning New York!" an almost too cheerful voice was saying.

"For those of you who are just popping out of bed, surprise! It is raining outside. But have no fear. The weatherman predicts that it will indeed stop by mid-morning, and the sun should break through later on this afternoon to make the rest of the day rather pleasant. And now, music to wake up to from Bruce Springstein."

Terry reached into the gleaming white refrigerator and pulled out a half-empty pitcher of orange juice. Grabbing a glass from the cupboard above the sink, she poured some of the brightly-colored liquid into it, and quickly drank down the juice. Feeling refreshed, she returned the pitcher to the refrigerator and promptly headed for the bathroom.

Twenty-three year old Terry Randolph lived in a small but cozy apartment in the Bronx, not very far from the famed New York Yankee Stadium. She lived alone, although it had not always been so. It still pained her to think about those times, times that had made up some of the happiest times of her young life. But, as always, things must change, and in her case, that change had been for the worse.

Her life wasn't all bad however. For the last four years, she had worked for the Smith and Simmons fashion company, and she had managed through much hard work to attain one of the top designer/ad planner positions. She had numerous talents which covered many different aspects of the business, and she was considered a valuable asset to the company. She had dealt with some of the most famous people in the line of high fashion, somehow attaining their trust in her company's work, thereby bringing in some of the biggest contracts the company had ever seen.

By the time she had showered and dressed for work, it was nearly twenty to eight. The rain still fell lightly, forming little streams on the tiny kitchen window. A rock tune blared on the radio, and Terry started for the kitchen to turn it off. As she reached the source of the "noise", the song ended, and the announcer's voice returned.

That was Pat Benatar and 'Hit Me With Your Best Shot'. And that was the story last night at Yankee Stadium as the hometown Yankees defeated the Boston Red Sox by a score of 5-3. Yankee catcher Rick DiRenzo had a long homerun in the fourth inning, and newly acquired shortstop Jason Danvers contributed with a crucial 3-run triple to put the Yanks in front. In other sports action..."

Terry decided to let the radio run after all while she gathered her coat and umbrella from the front closet. Preparing to step out into the rain, she half-listened to the remaining scores the announcer was reading off. She then turned to the door and exited, a Barry Manilow tune now beginning on the forgotten radio.

The front office of the Smith and Simmons fashion company was elegantly furnished with thick-cushioned chairs and shiny brass tables and other fixtures. Terry entered and waved a friendly hello to the head secretary who was busily sorting the mail. She hurriedly rushed to catch the elevator before its doors closed, and she pushed the button for the fourth floor.

Emerging on the fourth and top floor of the building, she could see Linda at her desk, also sorting the mail that had been delivered in the late delivery.

"Good morning Linda," she announced. The blonde secretary turned to her.

"Good morning Terry. Here's your mail," she said, handing Terry a small stack of assorted-sized envelopes. Terry began to thumb through the pile.

"What time is Mr. Sampson coming in?" she asked, opening one of the envelopes.

"Eight-fifteen," Linda replied, "And Gloria Van Daan said she could move her appointment up to 12:30."

"Great. That should give me plenty of time to finish up early so I can go to the game. By the way," she began, looking up from the letter she was reading, "did Frank come through and get me a ticket?"

"Of course I did," a voice announced. Terry and Linda turned to see Frank Simmons standing in the doorway. "Have I ever let you down?" He smiled and handed her a small, white envelope.

"Here you go. One right-field ticket to tonight's clash between the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox."

"Thanks a bunch Frank, I really appreciate it."

"You don't know how hard it is to come by these tickets at the last minute like that. The Yankees have been pulling in the crowds like crazy lately, especially since they signed that new shortstop Danvers," he explained, pouring himself a cup of coffee from the pot that had just finished brewing.

"Isn't he good? I think Jason Danvers is the best thing to happen to the Yankees in a long time. I've been watching him pretty closely, and I am very impressed. He sure knows what he's doing," Terry agreed.

"Well, I would like to sit here and chat with you ladies, but I must be going. Unlike some people, I have to get to work." He threw a teasing look at the two women.

"Since when do you have to work?" Linda joked as Frank turned and exited.

"Thanks again Frank," Terry called after him.

"Anytime," he returned, already halfway down the hall.

Once he was gone, Linda turned to Terry, who was again looking through her stack of mail.

"Okay, what's the idea?" she accused.

"What are you talking about?"

"Why only one ticket to the game? Are you really planning on going alone?"

"Of course," she nonchalantly replied.

"You can't be serious!" Linda exclaimed, exasperated.

"I am," Terry said, looking up from the mail she held in her hands. "I've done it before, quite a few times as a matter of fact. You know how much I enjoy going to the games."

"I know that. But you shouldn't be going alone all the time." She walked over to the table on which the coffee pot stood, and poured two mugs full of the steaming liquid. She turned around to hand one of the mugs to Terry, but found that Terry had already headed into her own office. Sighing, she followed her into the spacious room, and, finally catching up with her, handed her the coffee.

"You're hopeless you know," Linda stated, hoping to catch Terry's attention.

"You're supposed to be going out with me, not by yourself. You'll turn into an old maid if you keep on living like this."

Terry faced Linda, letting the mail slip onto her desk. You could almost detect the pain in her eyes, and her voice was edged with bitterness when she spoke.

"The last time I got involved with a 'man,' I got burned so badly I still hurt. I am not ready yet to make another commitment."

"Since when is one date a commitment?"

"When it becomes more than one date," she replied simply, taking a seat behind the oaken desk.

"Love isn't always painful. Sometimes it can be really beautiful," Linda pursued, hoping that maybe this time she would be successful in helping Terry overcome the impenetrable wall she had erected nearly two years ago.

"The key word there is sometimes," Terry said, seeming to have an excuse for everything.

"Well, have it your way. I have to get to work," she said, conceding to another defeat. She slowly headed for the door.

"I know your intentions are good, but I don't think anyone could ever understand the way I feel unless they have had to live through something like that themselves. Thanks for trying, but it's going to have to be something I do on my own. Believe me, when the time is right, I will get out with 'men'."

"Well, I suppose you do know how you feel better than I do. But I hope you overcome this thing soon. It would be a shame for you to waste your life grieving for the past." And on that note, Linda departed. Terry gave her last words a great deal of thought, and she knew Linda was right, although she still wasn't so sure about herself.

The crowd was jammed into Yankee Stadium like sardines in a tin can, and they were sure getting their money's worth. The game was as exciting as any game could be, with the Yankees maintaining a slim 2-1 lead going into the ninth inning. Both sides had outstanding pitching, and especially outstanding fielding by the Yankees had attributed to the high-key excitement.

The top half of the ninth came and went, but not before the Red Sox could come up with one more run to tie up the game. The crowd fell deathly silent, but the silence wasn't destined to last for very long. The fate of the Yankees laid in the hands of three men: catcher Rick DiRenzo, third-baseman Butch Hoffman and shortstop Jason Danvers. If anyone could do the job, the crowd knew that the combination of DiRenzo, Hoffman, and Danvers could do it, for there wasn't a more able group of men in the entire league at that moment.

Rick DeRenzo, a tall, dark-haired Italian, stepped up to the plate, only to be thrown out on a routine ground ball to the second baseman. One out.

Butch Hoffman, a blonde-haired young man from Alabama, was next. He took two big cuts at the ball, missing them both. The groans from the crowd grew even louder when he didn't even swing at the next pitch, and it was a called strike. Two outs.

Jason Danvers confidently stepped up for his turn. He knew that even if he didn't hit the ball, there was still some hope left for the Yankees--the game would be forced to go into extra innings. Although he hated the thought, he knew it was a definite possibility, and it seemed to help to ease the pressure.

Jason Danvers was 23 years old, and this was his first season in the major leagues. He had signed with the Yankees a mere four weeks ago, and he was quickly proving himself to be something beneficial to the team. He was an average sized man, with dark black hair and dark eyes. Some of the guys teased him that they were his "bedroom" eyes, but somehow Jason could not picture them as such.

The first pitch whizzed past his head for a called ball one. The crowd mumbled with anticipation. Terry could hardly do anything but hold her breath.

Pitch number two was a curveball that fooled the young rookie completely. He swung at it and missed by a mile. Moans emitted from the crowd. Terry winced.

The next pitch came across--the perfect pitch. Jason swung at it and connected. The crowd jumped to its feet as the ball sailed through the air, destined for the right-field seats all the way. Jason leaped away from home plate and started to skip towards first, his eyes never leaving the ball. If this was going to be his first major-league homerun, he was going to make sure it was gone.

Terry saw the white horse-hide coming towards her, and twenty other pairs of hands seemed to reach for it all at once, herself being no exception. Somehow miraculously, the ball dropped into her outstretched hands, and she clutched at it desperately. No one was going to deprive her of this souvenir.

She was watching Jason rounding the bases now; he was halfway between third and home. He glanced one final time at the stands, hoping to catch sight of the person who had caught the ball that had won the game for the Yankees, but he could see nothing but mobs of people standing, applauding, shouting.

Terry saw him looking, and when she saw what the scoreboard had to say, she could clearly understand why he seemed so interested in the ball. It was his first major-league homerun, something to be proud of indeed. And that's when she decided just what she would do.

Terry leaned up against the gleaming silver fence that surrounded the rear entrance to the clubhouse, silently waiting for Jason to emerge. The crowds had been dispersed long before; she had patiently waited in a cafe across the street. Somehow, she couldn't believe that she was really standing there, waiting for that one person to emerge from the clubhouse. And yet, she was there, holding the famed baseball that had won the game for the Yankees. She wondered if he would think her crazy to be returning the ball like she intended to do, but then again, she thought herself somewhat crazy to be doing this, so why wouldn't he?

Suddenly, the rear door of the clubhouse opened, and the lanky shortshop appeared. He was alone, and his face wore the expression of a truly happy man. He smiled when he saw her standing there, and she returned the gesture.

"Hi," he said, stopping to stand before her.

"Hi," she quietly replied, noticing how the faint lights of the parking lot made his eyes sparkle radiantly.

"What's a young lady like you doing out here at this time of night? There are a lot of crazy people out in this city you know," he warned casually.

"Well, my mother occasionally lets me stay out after ten," she replied coyly. He smiled again.

"But seriously," she began, "I'm really here because I wanted to give you something."

He looked at her with a question in his eyes.

"Oh?"

"Yeah," she shrugged, almost embarrassed. "I figured that you might want to have this because it was something special to you." She slowly pulled the ball out from where she had mischievously hidden it behind her back. He stared at it, stunned, then gazed up at Terry.

"Wh - is this...?" he uttered, hardly able to speak.

"This is the one and only homerun ball that you hit to win the game. Somehow, by some act of God, it filtered through about twenty other pairs of hands and landed in mind. And like I said, since it was your first major-league homerun, I thought you just might like to have it as a souvenir."

He took the ball from her and fondled it gently, a subtle smile on his face. "Thank you," he said warmly. "I really appreciate this. Most people wouldn't have even bothered; they would have kept it for themselves. But you, how can I thank you?"

"You just did," she smiled, feeling something strange tug at her heart; something she hadn't felt in a very long time.

"What's your name?" he asked, moving beside her to lean against a car. Terry's heart skipped a beat.

"Terry. Terry Randolph."

"Well, hello Terry Randolph," he said, extending his hand. I'm Jason Danvers, but I guess you already know that," he chuckled. Terry nonetheless shook his hand.

"Very nice to finally meet you Mr. Danvers."

"Call me Jason," he said quietly, his hand still holding hers.

"Very nice to meet you, Jason," she repeated, suddenly aware of his nearness, the feel of his hand closed loosely around hers. All at once, she felt confused, the memories of the past flooding back to her mind. She quietly removed her hand from his grasp.

"So tell me Terry," he was saying, breaking the silence that had momentarily engulfed them, "what did you think of the game?"

"I loved it!" she rejoiced, glad that he was temporarily taking her mind off thoughts of the past.

"Do you go very often?"

"As often as I can, though sometimes not as often as I would like. My schedule doesn't always allow me the free time to go."

"What do you do for work?" he questioned, pushing his hair away from his forehead. It was then that Terry noticed just how very good-looking he was.

"I'm a fashion designer and ad planner for the Smith and Simmons Company," she hurriedly replied, aware that she had been staring at him.

"That sounds very interesting. Have you done anything real famous that I might know about?"

"Not really. I've only been a designer for about two years, and it's only been small lines of dresses and gowns. I certainly wouldn't compare myself to someone like Gloria Vanderbilt or Calvin Klein."

"Now, those names I recognize."

"Is there anybody who doesn't? They are the biggest."

She was somewhat surprised at how at ease she felt with him now, even though the memories of the past still clawed at the back of her heart.

"How long have you been playing baseball?" she asked him.

"Practically all my life. I've never known any other kind of life. I live for baseball, for the thrill of it all, for the excitement, the cheering of the crowds, all that stuff that dreams are made of. I guess it's safe to say that I love the game immensely, and I don't know what I would do, except maybe go crazy, if I couldn't play for some reason."

"You must practice an awful lot. You seem to make it all look so easy."

"You'd better believe we practice a lot. Our coach expects two hundred percent effort from each and every one of us. He pushes us and drives us and beats us to our knees until we give absolutely everything we've got to give. And if he doesn't get that two hundred percent from us, he gets very disagreeable."

"Just how disagreeable does he get?" she asked playfully.

"He gets so disagreeable," Jason began, catching on to the joke, "that one time..." He broke off, laughing gently, and Terry joined in, loving the subtle way of laughing that he had.

"That one time," he started again, controlling himself, "he actually threw one of the guys, and I mean he literally threw this guy, into the shower because all the guy could do in three trips to the plate was strike out!" And on that note, the two of them broke into a round of hearty laughter. Terry felt so good; being with Jason and laughing with him seemed to ease her mind a great deal, and she was truly grateful to this stranger who had suddenly become a part of her life.

"When the sweet laughter had subsided, Terry caught a glimpse of her wrist-watch. It wasn't until then that she realized they had been standing in the parking lot, talking and enjoying each other's company, for nearly half an hour.

"Oh, wow!" she exclaimed when she saw the time.

"What's the matter?" Jason asked, sliding off the perch he had taken atop the hood of the nearby car.

"We've been sitting out here talking for almost half an hour now," she explained, pulling the collar of her jacket closer around her neck. The night air was cool, and a bit of a breeze blew in from the south.

"Has it been that long already? It only seemed like a few minutes. I guess it's true that time flies when you're having a good time," he breathed, moving closer to her. She could feel her heart start to pound slightly harder than normal. It had been months since any man had made her heart behave that way.

"I want to thank you again," he was saying. She only half heard his words.

"It was really a thoughtful gesture, although some people wouldn't consider it as such."

"You're very welcome," she answered sheepishly.

"I have really enjoyed meeting you and talking to you tonight. You certainly aren't just another fan; I can tell by the look in your eyes that you are very different, even a little bit special. Do you have to rush off, or could you maybe stop for a cup of coffee somewhere?"

From the tone of his voice, Terry knew that he was truly sincere, although she could scarcely dare to believe.

"I'd like to stay, but I really can't. I have an early appointment in the morning. But thank you anyway." Oh, how she wished she could have said yes to him.

"How about tomorrow night?" he suggested, not about to give up so easily. "Would you let me take you out to dinner? It wouldn't be until pretty late; I have a game. But I would really like it if we could get to know each other better."

"I'd love to," she answered, surprised that the words had slipped out so easily.

"Great! I'll pick you up sometime after the game, probably somewhere between 10 and 11, providing the game doesn't go into extra innings." He chuckled again at the thought of an extra-inning game holding up his date with her, and he rolled his eyes around in his head to express his thoughts on the matter.

"Let's pray that doesn't happen," Terry laughed.

"Well, I guess I'd better be going now. Some of us do need our beauty sleep," he joked, tossing his dark hair from where it had again fallen across his forehead.

"It was very nice meeting you Jason," she spoke, offering her hand. He took it in his and held it warmly.

"Same goes for me too," he said in a very quiet, sincere voice.

"I guess I'll be seeing you tomorrow night," Terry uttered, aware that he was still holding her hand. This time though, he was staring into her eyes and instead of feeling embarrassed like she thought she would, she found herself staring right back into his own deep brown eyes, captivated by their warmth and sparkle. She could hardly understand how she could possibly feel the way she did

after such a short amount of time, yet there was definitely something there, some kind of strange attraction that she hadn't felt in a long time. And all she knew was that it felt pretty good, and she honestly hoped that she could always feel this way and somehow forget about the past.

"I really think I should get going now. People will wonder what we're up to if we stand out here like this any longer," she said in a half joking fashion, trying to break the intense bond that had formed between them for the last few seconds. Jason continued to gaze into her eyes.

"Has anyone ever told you that you have lovely eyes?" he said. Terry lowered her eyes as the blood rushed to her cheeks. No one had said anything like that since...

"I'm sorry if I've embarrassed you," he apologized, "but you do have beautiful eyes."

Terry once again looked up into his face, and was met by his lips in a short, but nonetheless soft and pleasant kiss. Stunned, she took a step away from him, yet a smile had turned up the corners of her mouth.

"Goodnight Terry," he whispered.

"Goodnight Jason."

She stood by the car and watched him as he climbed into his own silver Porsche sitting about twenty yards away. She waved a short goodbye as he pulled out of the parking lot, and then he was gone. And with the trace of his kiss still fresh on her lips, she headed across the street towards her car, feeling unusually warm all over.

When Terry got home that night, she went into her bedroom and pulled out a thin, felt-covered scrapbook. Sitting on the edge of her bed, she looked through each page very slowly, painfully remembering the then special moments that went along with each photograph. Her heart was heavy as she thought of Jeff again, and of what they had once shared. Yet she cried no tears for him. For the first time since he had gone, she did not cry when she thought of him. And somehow, she knew that Jason Danvers was, for whatever small part he had played, the reason behind her lack of tears.

She looked at the one remaining picture - a photograph of the broken, twisted wreckage of a bright red Firebird - lingering on it for but a moment. Then she snapped the book of memories shut and placed it on the very top shelf of her closet. She was now ready to try and forget the past and get on with what she hoped would be a much brighter future.

Nearly two months passed since that first night, and Jason and Terry saw each other regularly. Even when Jason was away on road trips, he called her every chance he got, and when he was home, they spent endless hours together, running along the beach, dancing at fancy night spots, and just plain old being together. Things were really starting to get serious between them, yet Terry still couldn't manage to wipe away the fear that clung to the back of her heart. It refused to let her go, but she had to admit that at least it didn't hurt quite as bad as it once had, thanks to Jason.

One evening in late September, Terry and Jason had had an enjoyable dinner together. It had been one of those rare occasions when he didn't have a game that night, and he was able to spend it with Terry. Little did Terry know that the next few hours she would spend in his apartment would prove to be a milestone evening for her future with Jason.

"Would you like something to drink?" he asked as he approached his make-shift bar. Terry seated herself on the couch and stretched her tired legs.

"Just a soda will be fine."

"Just a soda coming right up."

She watched him pouring the liquids into the crystal clear glasses, the ice cracking softly. He looked fabulous, and Terry wished she could watch him like that more often.

Finally, he returned and handed her her drink. She sipped at it, thankful for the coolness. Her throat was awfully dry.

"It was a wonderful dinner tonight. Have I thank you yet?" she began.

"Yes, you've thanked me already. About a dozen times. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself, because I did too." He leaned closer to her, letting his arm fall gently around her shoulder.

"Can you believe the way things turned out for us? How we could have met under such strange circumstances, and how we somehow ended up being together like this?"

"I never would have guessed it could happen. To be perfectly honest with you, that was the farthest thing from my mind when I returned that ball to you way back then. I figured I would be lucky if I got your autograph, let alone meet you," she laughed softly, remembering that day as if it had been only yesterday.

"Are you glad that we got the chance to get to know each other like this?"

"I can honestly say that I am very glad that things turned out the way they did. You've made me feel wanted again, and it's a very good feeling to be feeling again after all that time," she drifted off, her heart pounding wildly.

"I have something very important that I want to tell you. I've been wanting to say it for a while now, but I never felt that the moment was right. I think it's time to tell you now," he said very seriously taking her glass along with his own and placing them carefully on the coffee table that stood before the couch.

"What is it?" she asked apprehensively.

"Well," he hesitated, almost as if he was searching for the perfect words to say, "I guess what I am trying to say is that I have fallen in love with you."

He stared at her; she stared at him, almost not daring to believe. Uncontrollable tears filled her eyes, and she moved away from him to stand alone by the window of the apartment. Jason, very concerned, rushed to her side.

"What's wrong?" he asked softly.

"I never thought I would ever hear those words again," she said, her voice barely a whisper.

"Why not? Surely you could tell how very much I care for you."

"Yes, I know. And I've fallen in love with you too."

"Then what's the problem?" His voice was so gentle. Terry could love him so much, if only her heart would let her dispose of her tremendous fear.

"That's the problem," she whispered, referring to the fact that they were both very much in love with each other.

Jason watched her, unsure of what to do. He knew he loved Terry more than he had ever loved anyone, and it pained him deeply to see her so hurt and confused. Yes, he could see the hurt in her eyes; he had seen it before on several different occasions. It always seemed to surface when they were together, but he could not understand why it was there. And why was she so afraid of loving him the way he loved her? His mind was a jumble of thoughts, and it took him a few moments to notice that Terry was trembling.

"Hey," he soothed, slipping his arm around her waist, "let's go sit down and talk."

He led her back to the couch and held her close to him for several long minutes before he spoke again.

"Tell me what's wrong babe. Tell me what got you so very upset. Have I said something, or done something to hurt you in some way?"

"No, it's not you. You've been perfect." Her voice was still very quiet.

"Do you want to tell me about it?" He was being so patient with her, and she dearly appreciated it. Nodding her head, she slowly began to tell her painful story.

"About four years ago, I met a guy named Jeff. He was beautiful and we fell in love very quickly, a lot like you and me. He was kind, and warm, and gentle. I loved him with all my heart, and I thought he loved me like that too." She stopped for a breath. Jason listened intently.

"One day, he asked me to marry him. We had been going together for almost two years by then, and I naturally said yes. We set the date, things were going along very smoothly, and everything looked just great. I was probably the happiest girl in town. Two months before the wedding was to take place, Jeff returned from a business trip saying we would have to postpone the wedding indefinitely. I asked him why, and he simply replied that it was due to business problems. When I tried to pursue the issue, he got very defensive and started yelling that if I loved him I would understand. So, things just kind of rested that way, but my heart ached like it never had. Three weeks later, I received a phone call in the middle of the night from a friend of mine at the police station. He told me that Jeff had been in a terrible accident. I didn't believe him because Jeff was supposed to have been away on business. My friend finally convinced me that he was telling the truth, but by the time I had arrived at the hospital, Jeff was already dead."

She paused again, as if the worst had not been told. Her hands were shaking visibly.

"Go on honey," Jason pressed, obviously very touched by what she had so far revealed. She took a deep breath before continuing, and when she spoke, her voice quivered.

"My friend drove me to the scene of the accident and explained to me that Jeff had apparently been drinking, and that he had lost control of the car, smashing it at a high rate of speed into a tree. I could scarcely believe what was happening, but the worst was yet to come. My friend told me that there had been a girl in the car with Jeff, and that she was very much pregnant. Both were killed. But then he showed me the marriage license that they found in the glove compartment of the car. It didn't have my name on it though. I bore the names of Jeff and the girl that was in the car with him."

"Oh Terry," was all Jason could utter as Terry's crystal blue eyes once again filled with tears.

"Ever since then," she continued shakily, "I've been so afraid to fall in love again, not because of loving someone, but because of the fear of losing that special someone. That day that Jeff was killed, I felt as though I had died inside, and I wondered if I could ever allow myself to fall in love again. I was so blind to what was really going on, and when I finally did find out, I was devastated. I hadn't been able to rid myself of that fear, not until you came along. You were so wonderful to me that you almost made me forget the pain. But the fear keeps crawling back everytime I'm with you, and the more I try to hide

it, the worse it gets. I'm just so afraid of loving you too much and losing you too."

She finally broke down and cried openly, and she crumpled into Jason's open arms, her shoulders heaving with every tear that fell. Tears filled Jason's eyes even as she cried, and he longed to help her rid herself of her fears. It pained him terribly to think that someone could let her suffer so badly.

"Oh babe," he whispered, stroking her chestnut hair. "I could never hurt you like that, never. How anyone could, I - I just don't understand."

"Somehow, I've always felt safe in your arms, but as soon as it starts feeling too good, the fear comes right back, and I wonder if things will ever be right."

Jason took her face in his hands and gently brushed away her tears. He softly stroked her cheek, his heart going out to her. He loved her so much; he knew he could help her.

It wasn't until then that Terry noticed that he had been crying himself, and something deep within the bowels of her heart suddenly snapped inside of her. She now realized that Jason cared for her more deeply than she ever thought possible, and she somehow knew that he would never hurt her as Jeff once had. She knew that she could, in fact, trust him with her heart. The revelation brought a new sense of warmth to her.

"I do love you Jason, more than I ever thought I could."

"I will always love you, and I will always be here for you. Together, I think we can lick this thing and make something of our lives together."

"I'm beginning to think the same thing."

"Believe me, I will be here for you. If all you want is to hear my voice, you'll hear it. Of if all you want is for me to hold you, I will."

"Hold me now please," she half pleaded.

"You bet," he smiled, taking her once again into his arms. A long silence passed before Jason finally spoke again. When he did, he held her away from him and looked her straight in the eyes.

"Will you agree to be my wife?" he questioned suddenly.

Terry looked up at him, her heart full of love, and nodded her head yes. He bent over and tenderly kissed her lips, a sign of the lifetime they were soon to be spending together.

"Thank you," she said, clutching his hand.

"For what?"

"For showing me how beautiful love is again, for loving me, and for being you."

"I'm glad you feel that way, and I hope you can always feel that way."

"I am confident now that I can overcome anything, as long as you're there to stand by my side."

"I will be there, and you will make it through indeed."

And with that, she cuddled in his grasp, just happy to sit quietly with him, knowing that now she could make it through anything.

I MADE IT THROUGH THE RAIN

"We dreamers have our ways of facing rainy days
And somehow we survive.
We keep the feelings warm, protect them from the storm
Until our time arrives.
Then one day the sun appears, and we come shining through
those lonely years.
I made it through the rain, I kept my world protected
I made it through the rain, I kept my point of view
I made it through the rain, and found myself respected by
the others who got rained on too and made it through.
When friends are hard to find and life seems so unkind
Sometimes you feel afraid.
Just aim beyond the clouds and rise above the crowds
and start your own parade.
'Cause when I chased my fears away
That's when I knew that I could finally say
I made it through the rain, I kept my world protected
I made it through the rain, I kept my point of view
I made it through the rain, and found myself respected by
the others who got rained on too and made it through
and made it through
I made it through."

(Lyrics by Drey Shepperd, Bruce Sussman,
Jack Feldman, and Barry Manilow)

LOVE ENDURES

by Marilyn Davidson

The glowing warmth of blue and amber
lashing out abruptly. Snapping. Popping,
falling like the starburst of fireworks
dissipating in the cool night air.
The licking flames envelope the log
as peace and tranquility surround my being.
Caressing and gentle is the love of the Lord.
His love is stronger than the fire that mesmerizes me
penetrating my soul with warmth.
His love is as subtle as the delicate daisy
amidst the tall grass
so easy to tread on, to neglect
in the efforts to reach my destination.
His love is as guiding as the golden rays of the sun
cutting through the clouds from the heavens,
reaching out across the plains.
For He is with me in every corner
that I hide my face, as dark and as grey
as the reasons for my avoidance.
For He is in every window that I look,
reflecting back to me what I really am
with love and understanding
patiently waiting for me to call to him
when I am not in pain.

ON WALKING DOWN THE BEACH AT YORK, MAINE

by Peter Rossner

Along the crowded beach we walk,
the foam swirling through our toes.
The strength we give to each other
flows like ocean currents through our hands.
Silently talking, we watch, and all around us,
people. But we are still alone.
A slight rain begins to fall and
children run to calling mothers who don't
want them to get wet. Jumping the waves
they come running and yelling, mothers and children
running and grabbing sneakers and blankets and tune
sandwiches and fathers are yelling and opening the
trunks to their Chevys and Fords and Buicks.

Fathers yelling and emptying the last swallows from
cans of beer and wiping the drips from their mouths
with sand covered arms.
We each laugh a silent laugh and walk on.
Up ahead a lighthouse flashes
her beacon to us, calling us on.
We stop, embrace, and I lick the sweet
rain off your face. You smile an
"I love you" at me, we kiss.
We walk again, down the beach,
in the rain, to the lighthouse,
together.

WINTER'S GIFT

by Judith Irizarry

What beauty, softness, and calmness it brings as it comes down and falls
gently on my head and face without making any sounds.

The grime, dirt, and ugliness that was once around, turns into whiteness,
purity, and fluffiness.

On the bricks, streets, glass buildings, the overpowering cities, and
lifeless, rocky mountains, it will form its white thick mounds.

Looking toward the sky, it then softly falls on my face, eyes, hair and
even though it is cold, I feel a sense of warmth.

Without a doubt, many spring-waiting people are amazed to watch it
accumulate so fast as they feel cold and icebound.

Not the winter people, with skis in hand, who anxiously, hopefully,
wish for it to come like the ocean's tides.

Just look how beautifully it surrounds the young white pine with its
soft, blue-green needled branches bending to the ground.

I know, for a fact, that I will always be patiently waiting to see it
again when the spring comes and summer and fall pass by.

POEM

by Leslie S. DeBord

The sun crept silently down.
Birds hovered amid the cloud.
And unforseeing the gragedy
Mr. Bill and his dog Spot were playing
Leapfrog behind their favorite brick wall.

Only moments passed before
Spot cocked back for a robust jump.
Springing up with such exhilarance
that not only did he clear Mr. Bill
but their favorite brick wall as well.

Saturated in panic,
Mr. Bill frantically
scrambled
to the top
of the wall, crying
Oh Nooooooooo. SPOT!

So caught up in their dilemma
neither saw the Greyhound bus
that swooshed by
and squashed Spot

QUESTION FOR ABIGAIL

by Julie Marceau

There's a coolness and a silence
here, intruders seldom come
Perhaps I spend more time amongst
these graves than anyone,
But it's as good a place as any
to shut life's business out,
crescendo pitch of noise and pain
Turns to one incessant shout
I have to find a place to hide,
Sort this confusion out
A place to sing these homespun blues
To make love to the wind
Sometimes I even wonder if
this ancient site may be
as good a place as any
to watch the world break down.

Abigail...you walked this same soil
once...has a century gone now?
Since your loved ones left your
Still-young form
Beneath this granite stone?
Flanked by three sisters
doomed to fall
in that same fateful year.
As good a time as any
for death to draw the harvest in.

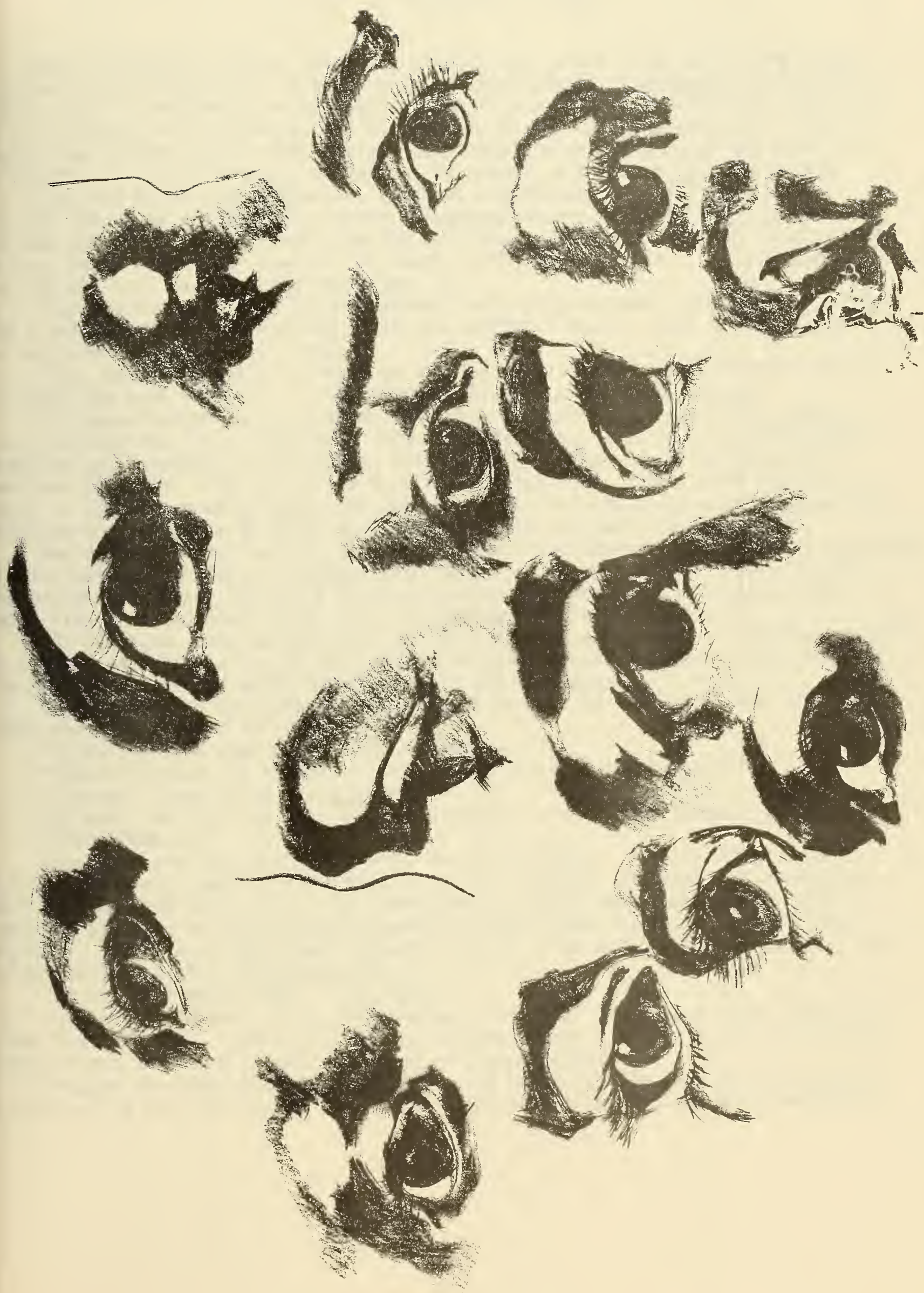
I'm torn to know the mysteries
of who you were
and where you went
or is the dust our only end
and will we ever know?
We fight and play, we cry and laugh
pick through the ruins and try again.
Doubt or believe in anything
and hope our Fear won't show.

As good a place
as good a time...
Can you return here abigail?
As your brief life worthwhile?
And knowing death's uncertainty
Who cares what path I try?

"SNOWBOUND IN MARCH"

by Judith A. Phelan

How beautiful
 but menacing
the midnight is
 when snowbound in March,
no light, no sound,
 save for the hurricane winds
 screaming through the cracks
 and crannies
 and drifts of snow
 piled high against the door.
Five candles burn
 upon the table
 to keep me company
 and slay the blackness
 on a snowbound midnight.
I know you are buried too
 in Spring's unwanted visitor.
If only we could warm each other
 with our bodies
 and rub toes against the frost,
there'd be no better place
 for us to be
 than snowbound together in March



THE ANSWER

by Janice M. Page

Over on Newbury Street, there was a small shop where kites were sold, every kind and color imaginable. The store was called simply: "The Newbury Street Kite Store," and it was owned and operated by the fairly well-to-do merchant John, who, at six o'clock in the morning, lay fast asleep in the upstairs apartment. He could have afforded much more, perhaps some handsome condominium on the outskirts of Boston, but he had enough, as much as he needed, all that he wanted to own.

Just the night before however, John had experienced the pain of despair. For one thing, he was terribly lonely for companionship. All of his friends from college were married, each had gone his separate way. And aside from a lady friend or two, there was nobody really. At least it seemed like that. He felt empty inside, and he'd been looking withdrawn.

Once and for all, John needed somebody with staying power. Something to give him a reason. Some help getting up in the morning. Mostly, John needed someone to love, and to be loved in return...

"Tell me!" he finally screamed at the top of his lungs before falling asleep, "is that too much to ask?" ...No. Never. True love alighted nearby.

For appearances sake, you might call this true love an angel. For names sake, you may even call the angel, "the Angel Madeline," but in truth, the Angel Madeline was something of whiteness, spirit, with a wing span of infinite proportions actually. Yet taking the form of an illustrious angel, with radiant wings, a shimmering white robe, and an expression that was truly angelic, the Angel Madeline hovered close by John, as he slept in his apartment on Newbury St.

Now John was about to wake up. As for the Angel Madeline, there was no question of waiting around. She was something of patience, so waiting was simple for her. And besides all else, the light from her divine presence was so luminous, she shone like a carved moon in the dark, spreading an aura throughout.

For starters, John thought this calling was rude and abrupt. He bolted upright in bed and said "What?" as if in question of some unforeseen answer. "No, John," the Angel Madeline had said, "Love is never too much to ask."

He searched for the portable alarm clock he kept by his bed on the nightstand. "What the heck time is it?"

"It is the time that it is," she said.

"What d'ya mean 'it is the..' it's six o'clock in the morning!"

"I know..." she said, plain as day.

The sun's not even up yet--and I can sleep in 'till nine today."

"Fine, John..."

John grumbled, put the clock back, and fell asleep. After a while though, (closer to nine), John lay face down in his pillow, full of terrified energy, unable even to come up for air. The inescapable thought that there was an angel hovering about in his room finally dawned on him, slowly began to sink in like daylight, in spite of his mind's repeated denial. The thing to do, it seemed, was to suffocate quickly, do it before she---

"Do not be afraid, John. I Am Here."

---speaks? He was a mass of blanketed confusion. He'd have to be nuts to budge from the spot. Who's will was to be done anyway? "To be, or not to be" came like a flash back from school, sounding very appropriate now.

Because the Angel Madeline understood him entirely, she knew why he was perplexed--which was NOT from an overworked imagination, in case you were wondering.

He was too anxious in trying to reason out something his conscious found hard to accept. Naturally he was bound to collapse, or fold up face down in bed.

"John," said the Angel Madeline, "why not come up for air?"

His first thought was that she had to be kidding. Imagine an angel joking around. Still, this bit of comic relief kind of put him easy. Slowly he began to relax. He thought he might take a look and see, but something stopped him. His eyes had to adjust, having never witnessed such light before. It was different from daylight--no, it wasn't like daylight at all. In fact, her light was so truly white, that she made the daylight look yellow. John considered her then as an angel.

He sat up naked in bed, unaware of himself except for some sweat which was now cooling upon him. As for the Angel Madeline, her stance was gentle and silent, for she saw right through him, the pain that had stained him, just how much he had suffered. But he was hardly remembering that. Now he was quite taken up, fascinated even, by her beauty. And it wasn't like natural beauty, or like the kind of angel you find on the cover of a magazine, for the Angel Madeline was the essence of beauty, something truly indescribable, he thought.

But this was not the time for astonished amazement just the same. Not the time to put anyone up there in higher than highest esteem. He didn't even know who she was! And he was a regular doubting Thomas when you come right down to it.

"So true," she said. I Am to you..."

"What d'ya want me to marry you?" he asked. "Okay, okay, I will if you want." Then he stopped to think twice. What the heck made him say that?

"Is that what you want, John?"

"I suppose...I don't know! I don't even know what 'true love' is anymore."

Of course there is a reasonable explanation as to why. You see, John had thought all along that true love was something you keep in captivity, in order to save it for a future bride. Eventually, he wanted a house in the contry, a wonderful wife, and perhaps a couple of adorable children. He would be very devoted. What's more, he would cherish each moment at home. Now there, he thought, was a reason for living. Then he would set his love free.

Meanwhile he was falling from grace as he was losing his peace. This wasn't helping business any, either. On a few occasions, he shooed the children away from his tore, said they were not to loiter. He became grouchy, snapping at everyone, even his one employee, Johanna, who probably loved him more than anyone else did on earth...come to think of it.

Anyway, the Angel Madeline's main concern was John, and his state of being. And because she knew all and saw all about John, she was aware he was falling, and he could understand why.

John, at the moment, was pretty bewildered. What sort of wife would she make, this angel? Some kind of guardian escort? Who would wear the pants in the family?

He got out of bed and put on his pants, the grey chinos he'd flung on the floor out of spite. And there was his shirt from last night. He put it on, half buttoned, and hardly what you'd call tucked in. Hopping all over, his boots were next. The he backed his way into the closet, fumbled around 'till he got hold of his best tweed jacket, and put that on too. He headed straight for the door, the advice of his own dependable brain.

"John?"

"I'm going out for a walk."

"Oh?"

"Look at you!" he ranted, "You're too perfect!"

"No more so than he..."

"He?"

"He who walks with me, John."

Out on Newbury St. John chose Clarendon to get onto Commonwealth Avenue.

What did she have in common with him? Or anyone else for that matter? The Angel Madeline floated along in silence, right by his side. Really, in John's heart, there was a flame...no, more like a burning desire to know her, to love her. But how on earth was he going to love her enough?

He thought he'd better call Johanna at work, tell her he wouldn't be in today, say he was sick or something like that. She'd have to mind the store without him. But then he remembered the store wasn't open on Sundays; pretty good planning, John thought, on the part of the angel. Could all this really be happening? What next?

"Even a space cadet like Johanna would never believe this," he said finally.

"Oh?"

"Not in my estimation."

"Perhaps," the Angel Madeline replied, "you underestimate her."

"Are you kidding? No one would ever believe me."

"Why is it, John, that you think no one would ever believe you?"

He stopped in his tracks to explain, arms flying up in the air. "Because I don't believe in all this myself for beginners!"

"This is true," she said.

The two continued, John quietly thinking on that. Then she said, "Yet Am I not Here, Now, Always, John?"

Silence again.

"I suppose...I don't know! What do I know? You seem to be the one with all of the answers around here. I mean, I don't even know what is 'true' anymore! Some things are true some of the time, but show me a truth that's true all of the time."

"I AM TRUTH, John, all of the time."

And the thought of it struck him like shattering icicles breaking on silence forever.

No need for looking both ways. The traffic on Arlington Street didn't phase him a bit. Cars swerved in every direction, but John just trotted along unaware, both hands in his pockets, his head bowed low deep in thought. They entered the Public Gardens together, John and the Angel Madeline.

"Wait a minute," he said suddenly, "something's different."

"Oh?"

"Ya..." He stopped to look around. The Angel Madeline gazed upon him. "Ya, something's different alright. And to think, I come here for lunch everyday."

"I know."

"You know what it is?"

"Tell me," she said.

"I will tell you," he said most assuredly. "Nothing's the same; it's remarkable, really." John scratched the top of his head while looking this way and that as if he'd never seen anything like it before.

"For instance," the Angel Madeline asked, musing.

"It's obvious, take the trees for example," he said pointing them out. "No two leaves are alike so no two trees are the same, you know?"

"Yes, I know."

Never mind that, he thought, every blade of grass was unique; and the sky, it

was constantly changing, rearranging itself. Surely he'd noticed all this before, perhaps when he was a boy. Now it was a revelation again. Not one thing on earth was the same as the other, most likely not even the stars. No, not even the stars. Some shone brighter than others at night. Was it really a matter of distance? Or progress? What about progress these days? Who knows, John thought. At any rate, not one plant, bird, insect or animal duplicated the other--not even the hands of a man. And John stood there, in the Public Gardens, completely amazed...could not get over his hands.

After a while, he looked to find the Angel Madeline. She was there in the distance, not too far away, and with bountiful wings of spiritual eloquence, she seemed to hold all that there was up with reverence, her watch fastened mainly on him. And because it was evident she was lacking in nothing, nothing on earth appeared to be lacking, not he, nor anything else in the gardens, not even anyone else anywhere. Who would believe it? And there was so much---

"Variation," the Angel Madeline said then.

"What?"

"The Variation. You see John, the world and everything on it, and all that lies beyond it, is a matter of variation."

"Ya, I see what you mean," he muttered. "Only I never looked at it this way before. I guess I always took exception. But I think it's a miracle, all this. I mean it. Look around! Who imagines it all up? Oh, I guess you'd know, huh?"

Just then John felt like a landslide happened inside him; at first he thought he was melting. "What's going on here?" he mumbled, "What's this action? I ask a simple question and I get this crazy sensation. He checked to be sure he was standing on the ground. Yes he was. There they were, the feet, standing on the ground. Yet he felt as much a part of the earth as everything else around--even the air--as if he were becoming invisible. Everywhere, there he was: part of it. The thing to do, it seemed, was to try to push all of his senses beyond the limit; see everything in the same light, breathe an even stream, feel--not part of it, but rather, be ONE with the whole of it...Yes! Of it all. That's too unthinkably vast, he thought then. Instantly, he was aware of himself, both feet flat on the ground. He fished in his pockets for added earthly sensation.

"Hey, what just happened, some cosmic trick?" he asked. There she was in the distance, the Angel Madeline, still holding, yet seeming to be sustaining it all, the way he had been just then! "That's amazing!" he cried. "But, what happened to variation?"

The Angel Madeline brought all of her shimmering essence back to bear, and approached him, glowing. "What do you think, John?" she asked, "is it gone?"

"No, of course it's not gone! I mean, this is it, right? Grass, trees, birds, bees, people, stuff like that I know, I know! But what else is there?"

"Infinite Perfection," the Angel Madeline answered.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Truth," she said then.

"But you just said--".

"Yes John, Infinite Perfection/Truth."

John held on to his head saying "oh my poor mind" to himself. "Look, I'm trying to understand this thing, really. But you keep saying that same 'truth' thing."

"Truth and Infinite Perfection are one in the same, John," she replied abidingly.

"I know, I gathered that by now. But what is this infinite whatever?"

"Perfection, John."

"Oh right. Sorry Angel. Perfection. What is it, some spiritual stuff? Or is it like energy? Or umh...like the force of life--you know, "The Force" and all that?"

"Yes, John," she said. "All of that, too."

"What d'ya mean 'that too'. What else is it?"

"Infinite Perfection is spirit, energy, life force--and, Divine Design: Simplicity."

"Angel, are you trying to tell me that all this is simple? Come on!"

"I Am," she said simply.

"I find that hard to believe, no offense."

"The variety that exists in the world, John, may be very complex; the way people relate to each other may seem somewhat confusing. But Truth, John, is always and ever so simple. You do not have to add, you needn't subtract, there is but One Truth applied to all things, all matters: Infinite Perfection. The Truth of your very existence, John, is one of Divine Simplicity, not intended to be as 'hard' as you imagine."

John sort of paused for a moment, considering the last of what she had said about him. He had to think back, remember the times he came up with solutions. The answers, the ones that worked anyway, had been "simple" once he cut through all the confusion, or once he gave up on the business of trying to figure it out. It was as if there was a source or something-inside-him from where the answers had come.

"You know," he said finally, "I've got news for you."

"Good," she said, seemingly pleased.

"This is going to sound crazy, though. I mean, right now I feel like I'm a needle inside of a haystack, but still, like I found it, you know?"

Cymbals rang inside his head because she shimmered so much. He might have left it at that, but no, John had to go and say "why".

"WHY?"

He was sure he saw the Angel Madeline blink, as if angels were not supposed to. He parked himself on the grass and picked a blade to chew on. "Ya, I'm serious. Why is there all that there is?"

"LOVE, John. All, by and large, is in love."

"You'd never in a million years think it to live in this world. I mean, you wouldn't believe the stuff that goes on."

"Still, John, in Love, all is choosing to be here now."

"Sure, love's what makes the world go 'round, right?"

"This is true, John."

"So what else is there, right?"

"Absence."

He started feeling creepy all over. All of a sudden he wanted to run. He was up on his feet in a flash. What the heck irked him like that? "What, may I ask, is absence?"

"Where there is nothing, John, there is absence."

He breathed a sigh of relief. "So absence is nothing to get shook over, right?"

"In space, John, absence is nothing. And, in substance, absence is only the end of the substance, for all things of substance do perish, whereas Perfection, John, can never perish. But when in a living being--like a man with a mind of his own, when in him there is implied absence, and LOVE is unknown to him--"

"I think I see what you mean."

"Do you?"

"Huh?"

"Do you see what I mean?"

...oh no, he thought, he couldn't mean him. Then again, last night...he practically hated himself, everyone else for that matter. He even contemplated spilling his guts. The Angel Madeline appeared to forgive him for that. He'd have to forgive himself somehow. The thought of it now broke his heart. But last night! He had plenty of reason! He felt empty for crying out loud! There was no one to--.

"Love, John?" the Angel Madeline asked. To receive love from the world, you simply show love. And to show love, you must know what LOVE is, that love is within you."

"But I hated myself last night!"

"I know. Now do you see John?"

"Yes, I do, thanks to you."

"Do you? In truth?"

"Well ya; I think...I thought so. What am I supposed to think? I wake up this morning and what do I see? An angel of all things, an ANGEL! For a while there, I thought I was dead or something, and I was thinking...I didn't know if I was in heaven or hell!"

"Naturally. You were indifferent then as you are now."

"Indifferent? About what?"

"Who am I? Why am I here?"

You know, John thought, that is a very good question. Who is she? Never mind that, who is he? And why is he here? "Tell me something. Why am I here, in these gardens, on this earth? To spend my days thinking about Truth? Or does that go without saying?"

The Angel Madeline did not reply. You might think that went without saying. But really, the reason she paused was out of respect for John.

"Well, I'm waiting. What's the verdict?"

"You are free, John. You are free to decide how, and why, and the way to experience living your life. You see? There is no verdict. You are free to choose. You can choose to know nothing, or all that you need to know NOW if you want."

"You know, I have so many questions, and yet you say this is simple---Angel?" He looked around; she had vanished. "Where'd she go?" he muttered. "Angel?" He began to wonder; who am I, who am I, who am I? He paced around in a circle, then he came back to where he began. Who am I, who am I, who am I--in truth? He waited, nothing came. So much for that. Then the answer astounded him, perhaps the way it did Moses. I AM I, JOHN, TRUTH.

At that he fell on the ground. He lay flat on his back on the grass. He wanted to laugh, to cry, to yell, and to spit, possibly, and to also be silent, to shake all over remembering pain, despair, sorrow...then never to mention last night again, for there is only here, now where he lay, when his feelings and every emotion welled up inside him, until emotion exploded and the plateau he was on became calm. He lay very peacefully.

For once there was nothing to say. There were no questions to ask. Only he was aware of his peace, the state of grace he was in. For within him, there was a presence; he wanted to see what this is. It vaguely occurred to him--for someone had said it, perhaps a long time ago--that his eyes were the windows of his soul, and that in them, he would have vision. Yet he was aware of only one eye, still true, nevertheless. Then it occurred to him vaguely, while waiting, that he was observing his own inner reaches: what appeared to be stillness of night, so as to behold: a Light.

For here, and now, there ~~shone~~ round, one true radiant light, total combination of all color, white, and perfect in every way. Then he knew that anything less would not be true, would not be perfect, as the Perfect One is; who, John understood to be LOVE.

To be honest, he could have died then and there, a satisfied man. The force of Love was so great, and yet Love was holding him back. This love is true love and lasting, he thought, amazingly still, and wonderfully patient...so what's the rush? Ecstasy, true. And freedom, too...but here, now, was joy in Love's wanting for him whatever he wanted on earth, and joy in Love's accepting his love in return. And in due course, he would return in Truth.

At that point, John took sight of one minute pinpoint of accuracy, a tiny light, white in color, perfect in form--precious. And then, in an instant, many of these appeared in true panorama, in perfect order: Infinite Perfection! And it was John's understanding that in this Divine Simplicity, nothing at all is complex or confused, but rather as simple as could be. How else could Truth be applied to all matter(s)? Since John was impressed by all this, Infinite Perfection was impressed upon him like identity, the Truth of his very existence. And because he found trust in himself, he came to trust in his understanding. For as he looked upon Infinite Perfection, it was revealed that In Truth, each one is precisely the same as the other, no more, no less. And In Truth, each one is taking a place by the other, an equal space, not one in the lead, no lagging behind. And In Truth, each one is as true as the other in every way, not one is in doubt about knowing the other. And In Truth, each one is In Love, and In Love with the other, is bound for and by Love; who, is all just in just one way: THE PERFECT ONE, WHO IS TRUE LOVE, IS GIVING ALL: INFINITE PERFECTION, AND ACCEPTING ALL IN RETURN.

THE SNAKE CHARMER

by Barbara Oslund

He handles them so well,
snakes of luminescent blue, green, purple,
they writhe and squirm
and hiss their anger at him.
His face remains set, weathered, snake-scaled.
A tattoo winds around his thick arm,
dagger tongue snaps across swollen bicep and
tail tightens at the bend of his arm.
attesting to his successes.
Yet when she comes, flashing fangs
and exotic silver arm-bands,
he shrinks away from her poison.
Afraid, for a serpent awakes
within him and grows larger
in its purple majesty.
She winds her arm around his
and they dance through gardens of snakes,
Serpents rising and snapping at her
brightly colored toenails, at the chains
on his ankles.
He, she --
in the midst of their tangling and coming together
She sinks her white fangs into the
soft pale flesh of his neck.
The poison strickens his body, and he,
the king snake, falls slowly away
from her deadly embrace.
The snakes crawl over his body
blue, green, purple, ropes around his arms.

Poem

by David G. Wyman, Jr.,

Squalid is my spirit's splendor
Bathed in wretched debauchery,
Castrated the illusion lies
Lifeless and void of being.

Odiously I taunt my mind
To compose a sullen verse:
In lyric have I not command
To transcribe interpretation

Of the subtle lines that
Like a waterfall, spill
Onto the empty page in
Manna which I cannot dam.

